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blue mountains FOREST RESILIENCY PROJECT

Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy | January 2017

A new year... the same challenge

Happy New Year from the Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy! We hope you have enjoyed learning about the Forest Resiliency Project and the importance of restoring our national forests to be more resilient to disturbances, such as wildfires and insect and disease outbreaks. We look forward to continuing to bring you updates on the status of this project as we move through the planning process.

The Forest Resiliency Project aims to move forests to more resilient conditions by decreasing tree densities on dry forest landscapes, while also proposing some limited treatments in moist forests to reduce risks of unwanted fire damage to vulnerable resources, such as municipal watersheds.

Treatments considered in this project include approximately 610,000 acres of vegetation treatments (logging and thinning) and prescribed fire treatments on the Ochoco, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests.

**These acreages are estimates and will likely change throughout the project planning process.*

So where have we been in 2016? The proposed action for the Forest Resiliency Project was released on February 5, 2016, for a 60-day scoping period. The planning team received 184 comments on the proposed action. During the scoping period, the team hosted eight public engagement sessions in the communities



surrounding the project areas to share information about the project and identify key concerns from the public to consider in project development. More than 170 people participated in the public engagement sessions.

The planning team has reviewed and considered all the public input received so far to further refine the proposed action and develop alternatives to the proposed action.

Past project updates and other information related to the Forest Resiliency Project is available on the project website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/bluemountainsforestresiliency>.

Darcy Weseman, Public Affairs (541) 278-3755

Featured... frequently asked question

Q. Why were some areas excluded from this project?

A. Lands were excluded from consideration in the Forest Resiliency Project for a variety of reasons. Some areas were excluded because they were existing Forest Service vegetation project planning areas, recently burned areas, recently implemented project areas, or because they were identified as low restoration priority. Other lands were excluded because existing law, regulation, or forest plan management direction restricts agency action. Examples include Wilderness, Research Natural Areas, or Inventoried Roadless Areas.

Meet our new team leader....

David Hatfield



The Forest Service is pleased to welcome David Hatfield as the new Eastside Restoration Coordinator. In his new role, David will replace Bill Aney, as the Eastside Restoration Coordinator, who retired at the end of December and also replace Ayn Shlisky as the interdisciplinary planning team leader, who left the agency in May 2016. David will lead the effort to complete the Forest Resiliency Project and facilitate sharing restoration successes with Forest Service staff and partners across Oregon and Washington.

David comes to the Eastside Restoration Strategy from the Umatilla National Forest, where he served as the Business, Natural Resources, and Planning Staff Officer.

David is a proven leader and is dedicated to making strides with the complex challenges of large landscape project planning. His knowledge of environmental planning law, regulations and policies, as well as his commitment to building relationships with interested stakeholders, will be a tremendous asset in addressing complex restoration challenges in Oregon and Washington.

Prior to working on the Umatilla National Forest, David served as a Forest Planner on the Manti-La Sal National Forest in Utah. In this position, he led the Utah Fire Amendment Project, which changed fire management direction across six national forests. David led a District-wide oil and gas leasing environmental impact statement in Montana and has helped revise land management plans in southeast Alaska, Utah, and Oregon.

David is a familiar face to local communities in the Blue Mountains. David has spent the past 14 years working with tribal governments, county commissioners, other agencies, and interested stakeholders on land management issues in the Blue Mountains. This wealth of experience will be vital to the continued success of addressing restoration challenges that face the Blue Mountains. Welcome David!

"I am honored to be selected as the Eastside Restoration Coordinator," David said. "I look forward to working with our partners and communities in this new role and building on the great work we have done together over the past 14 years."

Mollisols...

a look into a landscape of the past

When looking at a vegetation management project, it is easy to focus solely on what the trees need and how restoration can reduce the amount of overcrowded forest stands on the landscape. But forest ecosystems are far more complex, serving as home to many different plant and animal species. Overcrowded forest conditions alter the quality and sustainability of these habitats, but landscape-scale restoration presents an opportunity to be thoughtful about where we create or enhance habitats to provide future forests that are more resilient to the effects of a changing climate.

Soils often can give us clues as to the types of vegetation that historically or naturally should occur on a site. Mollisols, for example, are the soils of grassland ecosystems. Mollisols are characterized by a thick, dark surface horizon. This fertile surface horizon results from the long-term addition of organic materials derived

from plant roots.

In the Blue Mountains, many of the sites with mollisols exist on ridges, shoulder slopes, mid-slopes or flat lands and are currently forested. The presence of mollisols suggests these landforms historically were dominated by grasslands, with sparse and widely spaced individual trees or localized patches of trees. In the absence of fire disturbance, trees have grown into the previously open grasslands. Today, many of these areas are completely covered by a forest of trees.

So what is the problem? In some areas, mollisols can occur in soils that are shallow to very shallow in depth or have some other root limiting factor. In the Blue Mountains, many of these areas are currently overwhelmed by overstocked forest conditions. While shallow



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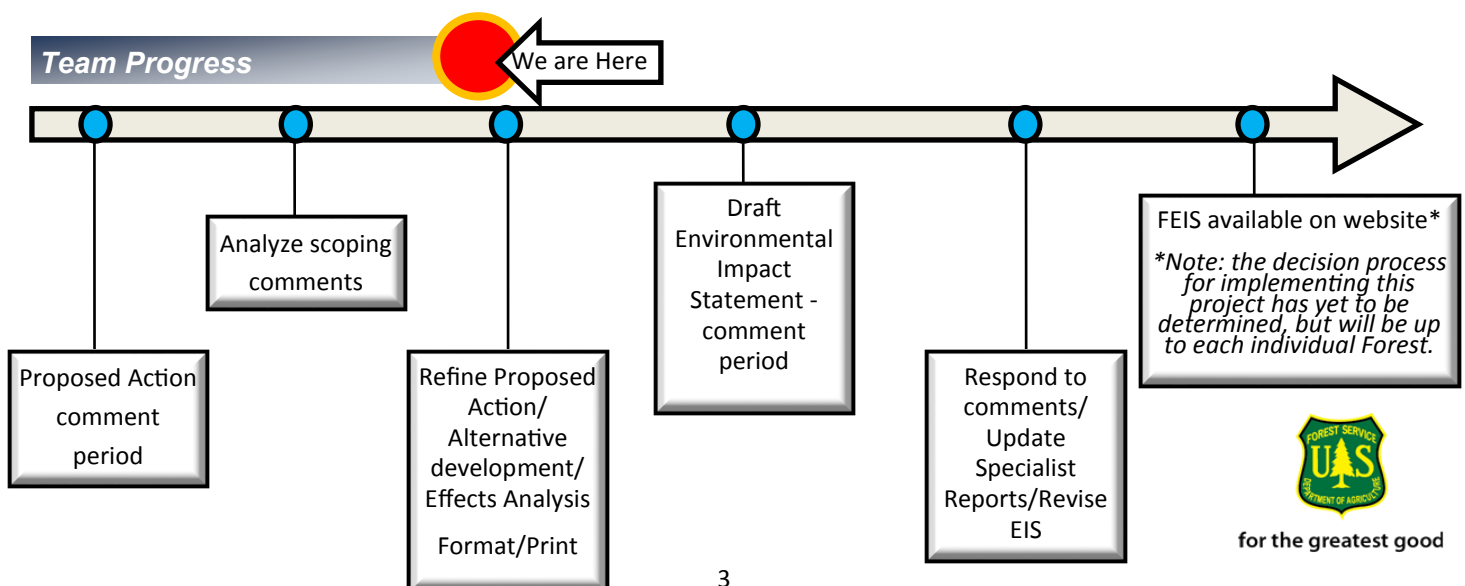
mollisols may have the nutrient capacity to support timber stands, the shallow soil depths tend to be droughty and typically cannot provide or sustain a forest full of trees. Historically, a dense forest would have been uncommon and/or short-lived because fire or insects would have killed them. An unintended consequence of excluding fire from the landscape is that we now have unstable, unsustainable forested conditions growing over shallow mollisols when there should be dry open grasslands.

When considering the extended drying trends predicted within climate change models, the ability of shallow soils to support trees will likely be further degraded or constrained. We cannot control climate trends and drought, and we cannot know how climate change will affect a specific place, but we do know that some tree species are more resistant to drought and fire than others. We also can use landscape features, like mollisols, to help design appropriate treatments that are more likely to be sustainable over the long term. By managing density and composition, forest managers support the growth of desired vegetation that can thrive under changing climate conditions. These treatments will reduce or mitigate drought-related stress and improve forest resilience. While reducing the number of trees might not necessarily affect overall water consumption, active management can reduce competition for nutrients and create healthier forests that are better able to resist drought stress, insect attack, and uncharacteristic wildfire.



The Forest Resiliency Project provides an opportunity for land managers to take a landscape-approach to creating a more resilient ecosystem. The Forest Resiliency Project is being designed to set up our forests to be resilient against natural disturbances in the face of a changing climate. By reducing stand density across large landscapes (thinning the number of trees on an acre), adjusting species composition (altering the species of trees and other vegetation growing on a site), and creating mosaic forest patterns, we can reduce the risk from uncharacteristic wildfires, and allow fire to play its natural role.

The Path Forward... where are we in the NEPA process?



Restoring Resiliency... in this issue

- Project Status
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Features from the Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy

Sustainable Northwest and the U.S. Forest Service Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy Team are pleased to continue our partnership for the Features from the Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy.

This series of articles highlights the environmental and economic challenges and opportunities present in the Blue Mountains region, and includes updates from the Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency Project. So what did you miss in 2016? **Follow the blog to find out!** <http://www.sustainablenorthwest.org/what-we-do/success-stories/features-from-the-blue-mountains-restoration-strategy>



FOLLOW OUR PROJECT:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/bluемountainsforestresiliency>

Blue Mountains Restoration Strategy
72510 Coyote Rd.
Pendleton, OR 97801



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